

A new 'ERA' of women and leadership

The gendered impact of quality assurance in Australian Higher Education

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Quality assurance policies and practices are critical to the performance of Australian universities both in terms of national funding and international prestige and are redefining the future of the academic enterprise. Quality assurance is not merely the systematic measurement of quality. It is a political and heuristic process, which has significant gendered consequences for academic women in higher education. This paper problematises quality assurance measures such as the Australian Government's Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative and reveals the tensions between neoliberalism and equality in a new era of higher education management. The embedded gender biases in research output reporting highlight a lack of commitment to academic women's representation and leadership in academia. Since research performance plays such an intrinsic role in academic promotion, understanding the relationship between gender and assessments of research excellence is crucial to addressing the differences in male and female academic career trajectories and the paucity of women in academic leadership.

Keywords: women, leadership, quality assurance, gender, Excellence in Research for Australia

'ERA data is [sic] an ideal tool to guide strategic planning and investment, including aligning research strengths with industry, regional and national priorities to maximise the benefits of public investment in research.'

Australian Government, Excellence in Research for Australia

'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.'

Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider

Introduction

The Australian higher education sector has undergone significant operational changes over the last three decades; indeed both public and private universities are

experiencing the effects of a new era in higher education policy; of unprecedented student enrolment, a gradual decrease in government funding, and an increase in the marketisation of academic research. Deregulation of the higher education environment in Australia in favour of corporatisation and performance-based funding models is highly visible and has increased competition amongst universities for funding and prestige. Quality assurance policies and practices are intrinsic to the operationalisation of the corporatised academy and are critical to the performance of Australian universities both domestically and internationally. Quality assurance measures are redefining the future of the academic enterprise. One such auditing method is the Australian Government's Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative. Established in 2010 as 'an assessment system

that evaluates the quality of the research conducted at Australian universities', ERA is designed to manage quality (Australian Government, 2015). It is 'a retrospective measure of research quality, volume, application and esteem aggregated into an overall performance rating' with research quality compared against national and international benchmarks (Marsh *et al.*, 2012, p. 85). It has quickly become an integral element of the changing higher education landscape in how it informs government policy and determines the levels of government funding universities receive. ERA financially incentivises increased research excellence and productivity. However, the speed at which such quality assurance measures are adopted can have significant negative repercussions for the academic endeavour if not critically analysed in its local context. Particularly in terms of what types of research constitute excellence, who produces such work, and what new values are derived from such a process. What's more there has been little pause to question whether this market-oriented environment and the quality assurance measures that are shaping it are addressing the ongoing gender issue in Australian higher education; that of the paucity of academic women in leadership positions, and whether new managerialism and quality assurance are providing new opportunities or constraints for academic women.

This paper problematises quality assurance exercises as reflected in ERA and reveals the tensions between neoliberal and equality projects in a new era of higher education management. ERA is a gendered quality assurance measure; both in its inception and in the outcomes it produces. Quality assurance measures are inflected with political and heuristic biases that unequivocally support a neoliberal corporatised higher education agenda. In its current form, ERA is not an effective measure of the quality of Australian academic research because it ignores the gendered differences in research output. The omission of gendered (as well as raced and classed) social factors in such evaluation mechanisms has significant implications for the status of women in academia. This inattention to the gender representation of research output in Australian higher education comes at a time when academic research and the commercialisation of such research plays an intrinsic role in the construction of leadership priorities and identities in the corporate, self-managed university. This paper also explores whether or not the objectives of quality assurance could be redirected towards principles of social justice, and whether an incorporation of equality into quality assurance measures such as ERA could assist female academics and improve the representation of

women in leadership positions. Whether, or not, the 'master's tools' can dismantle 'the master's house' has been at the heart of much feminist debate over the limitations of gender equity reform from within institutions. Quality assurance should have the capacity to integrate equality measures on par with that of research excellence.

Methods

This inquiry into the gendered dimensions of the systems that now govern universities is timely since universities are now preparing for the 2015 round of ERA reporting. The Australian Research Council (ARC), the statutory agency responsible for overseeing the ERA project, recently declared on its website that gender data is 'being collected for ERA 2015 to improve the ARC's ability to understand issues relating to gender and equity in relation to Australia's university research landscape' (Australian Government, 2015). The ERA 2015 Submission Guidelines states that:

Institutions will be required to submit gender data for each eligible researcher. Gender data will be used for reporting and analysis purposes only. Data will not form part of the evaluation process and will not be made available to peer reviewers or Research Evaluation Committees. (Australian Government, 2014a, pp. 7-8)

While this news is a welcome advancement, it necessitates further critical discussion of quality, gender equity and equality in research output measurements. The Australian Government's ERA 2012 National Report (2012) does not disclose the gender composition of previous submissions. In the absence of such statistical data there is evidence that indicates gender discrimination and inequality in both the academic workplace and society more broadly, impacts upon the research careers of academic women and this results in women's research output being less than that of their male counterparts. This paper aims to generate a discussion on gender and quality assurance informed by both quantitative and qualitative research. Consistent aggregated quantitative gender data can provide a clear snapshot of gender differences in research output; however, it is not just statistical evidence but also about how such figures are socially and culturally informed that is necessary for critical discussions on quality assurance and gender equality in academia. This paper does, however, critically analyse numerical data on the gender composition of the 2012 ERA Evaluations Committees, which was gathered from the ERA website and verified by each institution's researcher profiles.

While I concur with Morley (2014), Blackmore (2013) and others that 'adding in' women into such elite systems of knowledge production 'is not an end in itself' (Morley, 2014, p. 124), this data in combination with qualitative literature demonstrates how gender bias is evident at all stages in the quality assurance process and contributes to the paucity of academic women in positions of authority and leadership.

A new era of university management and quality assurance in Australia

Since the first full round of ERA reporting occurred in 2010 there has been limited critical discussion on the ways in which ERA perpetuates gender inequality in Australian universities. This is because to do so requires a radical disentanglement of the presumed purposes and values of academic work from the interests of neoliberalism. ERA is indicative of Australia's engagement with the international higher education market. Quality assurance measures are deployed by a government that simultaneously seeks to reduce its financial commitment to, and also increase its control over the recently corporatised higher education sector (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Deem *et al.*, 2008; Morley, 2003, 2014; Lafferty & Fleming, 2000). Defined as 'new public management', or 'new managerialism', this new form of corporate university management 'is characterised by public sector institutions adopting organisational forms, technologies, management practices and values more commonly found in the private business sector' (White *et al.*, 2011, p. 180). It is based on the neoliberal rationality that institutional competition and consumer preferences are more efficient mechanisms for allocating resources than government interventions and regulatory frameworks. Measurements of research output, a valued commodity on the international higher education economic market, are thus used to gauge productivity and performance (Deem *et al.*, 2008; Grummell *et al.*, 2009). An increased focus on the outcomes of quality assurance reporting is altering the ways in which research 'quality' is measured and subsequently valued by those inside and outside of the academy. Moreover, quality of research becomes not just a matter of whether academics publish their research, but about what they publish, where they publish it, and how often it is cited.

The intensification of work and the mantra of 'publish or perish' are endemic features of academic life and a result of new managerialism and the underfunded expansion of universities (Gill, 2010; Morley, 2003; Reddan, 2008; Bolden *et al.*, 2012). The lack of cohesive

and collective criticism against new managerialist practices and quality assurance measures is further complicated by the individualisation of academic research. A call for greater accountability of academic research, which prompted the development of ERA, is ubiquitous with increased managerial and organisational power. As Smith reveals, quality assurance is 'not about rooting out under-performing departments; rather, it is to make academics "docile" in accepting expansion and the government's definitions of quality' (2008, p. 624). This control society of 'capitalist realism' traps us in the various manifestations of neoliberalism: the updated ideas of liberal economics, of free trade, privatisation and deregulation, all of which are underpinned by the logic of capital (Skeggs, 2014; Newman, 2013). Notwithstanding, neoliberalism is a highly contested concept, it is nevertheless, as Clarke (2008) describes, a 'promiscuous' term, one which is 'widely overused and notoriously difficult to pin down' (Newman, 2013, p. 205). Neoliberalism appears almost resistant to criticism precisely because it has individualised and internalised the norms of capitalist logic and self-interest (Skeggs, 2014), making it difficult to articulate the origins of inequality. This is the rhetoric of a free market economy; it comes packaged with intensive managerial control practices (Lorenz, 2012; Deem *et al.*, 2008). This individualising discourse is complicated by its appropriation of the mythology of 'the academic good life'. The pleasures and satisfaction of scholarly work and academic's passionate investment in research represents a critical example of how the university workplace has been neoliberalised. Gill (2010) notes that, in many ways, academics are the ideal neoliberal subject. Academics are concomitant in the process of neoliberalising academic labour, and the work ethic of the 'ideal academic' reinforces what Berlant (2011) describes as 'cruel optimism'; that is that researchers' relentless dedication to and investment in research and teaching does not allow them to challenge or alter established structures but merely to accept and endure the inundation of academic work, and increasing administrative responsibilities (Baghote & White, 2011).

The political and heuristic biases embedded in quality assurance

Criticism of neoliberal management policies and practices that now underpin the Australian higher education sector are also fragmented and weakened by the underlying politics of quality assurance. The notion that quality assurance is a political tool is not new.

However, the majority of literature on quality assurance in higher education, both in Australia and internationally, concentrates on the technical aspects of the process rather than unpacking embedded partialities inherent in such measures. Neoliberalism perverts concepts of 'efficiency', 'accountability', 'transparency', and 'quality' for the purposes of profit and these redefined ideas are then implemented and actualised by new managerialism. The purpose of quality assurance is typically recognised as accountability and improvement. The definition of accountability being used in quality assurance and new managerialist discourse is derived from financial usage and is in direct opposition with common understandings of accountability as democratic and egalitarian (Lorenz, 2012). Kate White *et al.* (2011) cite quality assurance measures as 'a classic example' of new managerialism in operation. The neoliberal accountability prerogative appropriates a social rationale as justification for the implementation of quality assurance measures so as to obscure its financial intentions. It also implies an unproblematic

moral necessity and hence neutralises the political characteristics of quality assurance. It is therefore not difficult to understand how and why government imposed quality assurance may have a particular agenda. Skolnik proposes that it is not ill-conceived to imagine that higher education leaders could 'define quality in a way that best served their interests' (2010, p. 9), particularly if individuals and institutions are unable to challenge the implementation of such quality assurance processes. Lorenz highlights the paradox when he contends: who 'can legitimately stand opposed to "transparency", or "quality" or "accountability"?' (2012, p. 625). The interactions of power, knowledge and meaning shape quality assurance processes and support their continued operation despite ongoing criticism (Houston & Paewai, 2013).

The ARC makes explicit the Australian Government's justification for ERA when it states that ERA 'data is an ideal tool to guide strategic planning and investment, including aligning research strengths with industry, regional and national priorities to maximise the benefits of public investment in research' (Australian Government, 2014c). This explanation reveals the political motivations behind the implementation of ERA. Public stakeholder confidence in the 'quality' of Australian academic research is considered paramount to the quality assurance exercise

in order to meet the needs of the prospective and existing customer. In this corporatised higher education model, students and parents are repositioned as private individual consumers investing in their education, expecting a return on their capital. As such, 'considerable resources are allocated to the effective packaging, selling, and distribution of the "product" and images, slogans and marketing campaigns are utilised to endorse the product and attract increasing numbers of consumers' (Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 26). Research excellence is understood as being an important commodity in this practice. Neoliberal principles of individualism, competition, standards and improvement are embedded into new managerialism, values, that Fitzgerald and Wilkinson (2010) propose, run counter to values of equity, collegiality, and cooperation. Accountability 'is assumed to be an intrinsically desirable goal, and nobody ever claims that one can have "too much" accountability – the pressure is always for more' (Charlton cited in Lorenz, 2012, p. 617). Thus, arguments against the need for more 'transparent' 'accountability'

to stakeholders go largely unchallenged and the political motivations obscured.

Quality assurance measurements such as ERA are also based on an individual's heuristic judgements and definitions of what constitutes quality as well as political bias. Assessments of excellence are 'far from being an exercise in disinvested and disinterested judgments' it is 'one of situated decision-making, reproducing the cultures from which it emanates' (White *et al.*, 2011, p. 181). Houston and Paewai (2013) assert that the accountability argument for quality assurance is biased towards those that design and implement such measures, namely government and quality assurance agencies. Theorisations of critical systems heuristics can be used to better understand the aims and potential scope of such projects. Quality assurance can be understood as a series of systems. These systems require the quality assurer to make decisions about the direction and implementation of quality assurance processes. As a consequence, definitions of quality will be specific to the assurer's methodological approach, their values, and desired outcomes. Socially-driven quality assurance ensures the presence of heuristic elements, which limits rather than improves issues surrounding such processes and measures.

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Thus quality assurance is not merely the systematic measurement of quality. The unchallenged and perceived neutrality of quality assurance disguises its very power. Politics and the heuristic motivations behind those ideologies are used to determine 'the public allocation of things that are valued' (Skolnik, 2010, p. 3). ERA 'aims to identify and promote excellence across the full spectrum of research activity in Australia's higher education institutions' (Australian Government, 2014). However, what constitutes quality in higher education is not neutral or objective. It is imbued with value. A critical systems heuristic approach highlights that the narrowing of process possibilities that occur during the design of quality assurance measures and the political perspectives of the decision-maker disadvantage the activities being audited and hinder quality improvement. In recognising that quality assurance is a political and heuristic process, it must be also acknowledged that these personal and political motivations are also inflicted with gender biases. New managerialism exacerbates inequity and unequitable practices in its reproduction of top-down hierarchical power relations. It reinforces patterns of inequality and is a 'terrain deeply marked by gender and gendered boundaries' (Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 25).

The influence of gendered social factors on research output

Measure plays an integral role in the creation of value and the social construction of reality (Adkins & Lury, 2012), and as such, it is crucial to understand the ways in which new managerialism both promotes and devalues the contributions of female academics, and how quality assurance measures based on research productivity affirm dominant institutional narratives of 'quality' in research and leadership as being masculine (Thornton, 2013; Morley 2003). Gendered social factors also influence research output. Forty-four per cent of academic staff in Australia are female, yet women represent only 28 per cent of staff above senior lecturer level and only 25 per cent of university vice-chancellors (Australian Government, 2014b; Universities Australia, 2010). Women are by no means absent from the contemporary academy. Yet women are far from achieving parity with men in professorial and formal leadership positions. The gender gap is even more noticeable between the levels of associate professor and full professor (Pyke, 2013). The traditional linear career trajectory from assistant lecturer to professor to executive dean is no longer the norm and

yet it remains the standard and assumed model to attaining formal leadership positions despite the significant changes to the academic labour market (Grummell *et al.*, 2009; Chesterman *et al.*, 2003; Bagihole & White, 2011; Morley, 2014). Previous qualitative and quantitative research on women in Australian universities shows that marital status, number of dependent children, elder care, doctoral degree, academic rank, teaching over research, workload, research collaboration, and research funding all influence women's career progression. Many women also experience multiple pressures in combination with overt and concealed types of discrimination that consequently have an impact on their professional and personal lives (Eveline, 2004; White, 2003; Broadbent *et al.*, 2013; Dever & Morrison, 2009; Probert, 2005, Bagihole & White, 2011). Despite universities' insistence on the centrality of equity and diversity to institutions' practices, what is forgotten is the extent to which women must negotiate societal discourses and gendered barriers in order to compete on an equal footing with men. Women have been included in the academy and recognised in policy without any real change to existing gendered social structures. The barriers are multiple and systemic (Morley, 2014; Pyke, 2013; Probert, 2005; White *et al.*, 2011; Grummell *et al.*, 2009; Bagihole & White, 2011)

Broader gender inequalities continue to characterise academic employment, academic influence and excellence, and notions of the 'ideal academic' in Australian higher education. Fiona Jenkins in her research on women in philosophy interrogates: 'if merit is based on achievement why is it that talent and hard work are mostly represented by white males?' (2013, p. 81). Merit implies that the best person for the job should be appointed in relation to his or her abilities and achievements, irrespective of status, gender or other facets of identity. It is an ideological system for establishing and legitimating hierarchy and inequality based on individual achievement. It is supposed to replace inherited privilege as a means of allocating rewards, power, and resources and to establish legitimate hierarchies and ensure excellence, but it is also a system of power. Merit prevents an interrogation of its systems through its naturalisation as an apolitical process. In organisational logic, jobs and hierarchies are abstract genderless categories. However, a theoretical descriptor of a job only becomes tangible if there is an individual to occupy the position. Acker states that 'the concept of "a job" assumes a particular gendered organisation of domestic life and social production' (1990, p. 149). The universal 'individual' is, in social reality, a male. Thornton argues that:

... the ideal academic continues to be constituted in the image of Benchmark Man. This normative masculinist standard favours those who are Anglo-Australian, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, not elderly, espouse a right-of-centre politics and a nominal mainstream religion, if any. (2013, p. 128)

This is because under the logic of capital, male bodies are understood to have the most capacity to accumulate capital (Skeggs, 2014; Grummell *et al.*, 2009). Merit is inflected with bias and integral to neoliberal corporatised higher education. Women, and particularly women of colour, fall short against the ideal academic. Despite merit and equal opportunity, there remains a lack of diversity amongst university leaders. Tanya Fitzgerald states that 'women's presence in the world of men is conditional to them being willing to modify their behaviour' (2014, p. 6). Many university equity and diversity programs aim to assist women to better navigate the prevailing higher education landscape, and to assimilate into the overarching patriarchal structure. Grummell *et al.* (2009, p. 192) note that under this new highly individualised neoliberal enterprise, old masculinities have been remade in order to 'maintain hegemonic male advantage'. Feteris (2012), Fitzgerald (2014) and others observe that: 'the only path to success is for women to learn to become honorary men' (Feteris, 2012). Institutions' submissions to ERA reflect a gender bias in research output, which in turn influences perceptions of the worth and value of research excellence.

Gendered values around notions of the ideal academic and what constitutes excellence in conjunction with ongoing gender inequalities result in women academics producing less quantifiable research. The gender representation may be quite similar when the rate of publications is relatively low but previous research demonstrates that at the apex, men continue to publish three times more than women and are more likely to represent the majority of top-tiered publications (Bentley, 2011; Wilson, 2012). Women's underrepresentation in higher education leadership is not about women's lack of ambition or capabilities but 'a consequence of the limited opportunities created in an environment of systematically gendered cultural, social and structural arrangements that inform women educator's choices and possibilities relative to their male colleagues' (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p. 13). Women continue to over represent in stereotypically 'feminised' academic disciplines and in disciplines with weaker access to industry and government funding and underrepresent as editors of journals (Morley, 2014). The gender identity of jobs and occupations is continually reproduced in new forms. Acker notes that 'even if men

occupy lower-ranked positions masculinity always seems to symbolise self-respect for men at the bottom and power for men at the top' (1990, p. 145). Furthermore, disciplinary differences are also gendered. If publications are based on articles only, the gender difference would be partially due to the greater proportion of men in the sciences, for instance, where articles are more common than books (Bentley, 2011; Marsh *et al.*, 2012). Publication output differences could also reflect the gender representation or culture of a particular discipline. For example, in the sciences there is also an issue of being the first or last author on papers, in which women are rarely the lead investigator or author (Wilson, 2012). Similarly, differences in research publication output may vary amongst institutions. These gendered disciplinary and institutional differences are imbricated with pre-existing gendered social factors, which impacts on the research output of academics.

The bias in research output affects which researchers have influence in both academia and in the public domain. Female academics are more likely to experience career interruptions, which undermine their (perceived) competitiveness and negatively impacts on their research productivity. As a consequence, women are also less likely than men to apply for promotion; they form fewer research collaborations and apply for fewer grants. Female academics, as they tend to work in fields that are less likely to attract industry funding, are less likely to be considered as working in national research priority areas. These all influence women's academic membership and career progression (Ahmed, 2006; Bentley, 2011; Feteris, 2012; Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010; Luke, 1997; Probert, 2005; White *et al.*, 2011; Grummell *et al.*, 2009). Fewer publications equates with less opportunities for promotion. Academic status is a symbolic representation of academic influence and legitimacy. As a consequence, 'a minority of highly productive researchers' may indeed account for 'a disproportionate share of total publications' (Bentley, 2011, p. 95). The quantification of research output is highly gendered and there is a need to interrogate existing, taken-for-granted notions of measure and value as contributing to the continued paucity of academic women in leadership in Australian higher education. The lack of women in senior academic and leadership positions is both a factor and an outcome of female academics' lower rates of publication in comparison to men and the ways in which quality assurance measures are gendered. These gendered differences in research output should prompt a re-evaluation of systems of measurement such as ERA. Research audit exercises not only purport to evaluate

'quality' but they also determine 'worth' and 'relevance' of research in terms of its international currency. What constitutes 'excellence' is currently generated and inhabited by a predominantly male academic cohort (Fitzgerald & Wilkinson, 2010) and, as Jenkins notes, this gendered dominance acts as a 'powerful mechanism of affirmation of subsisting institutional arrangements' (2013, p. 83).

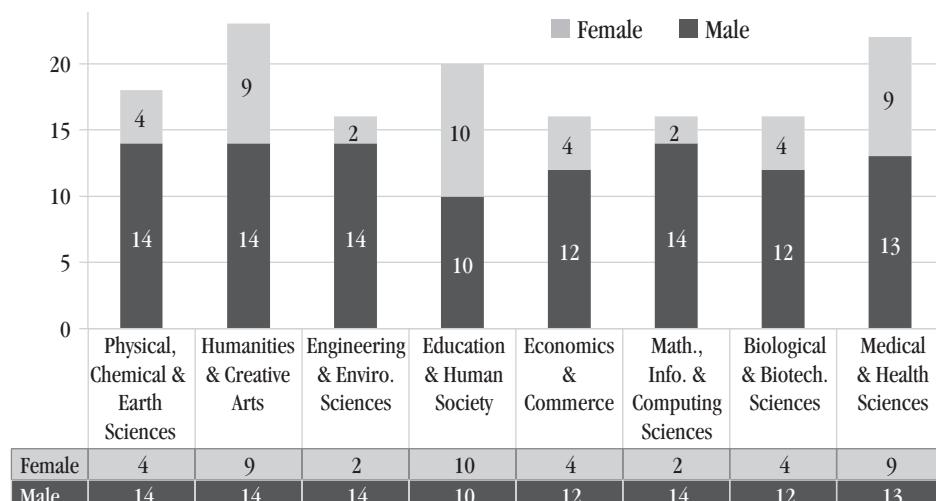
The significance of gender representation in academic leadership

Considering the gendered history of women's careers, female academics' experiences of discrimination, and the imperviousness of gendered organisational structures; why, then, if at all, should women aspire to enter into higher education leadership? Morley (2013a, 2014) raises this valid question in her exploration of the affective dimensions of crafting and managing leadership identities, which is about who self-identifies, and is identified by existing power elites as 'having leadership legitimacy'. The embedded gender biases in quality assurance measures such as ERA highlight a lack of genuine commitment to academic women's representation and leadership in higher education. This is no less evident than in the gender composition of the 2012 ERA Evaluation Committees. ERA ratings are 'determined and moderated by committees of distinguished researchers, drawn from Australia and overseas' (Australian Government, 2014c). The 2012 ERA evaluations were undertaken by eight Research Evaluation Committees broadly representative of disciplinary cluster groups. While the gender of the Committee Chairs was represented equally, only one of the eight Research

Evaluation Committees had equal gender representation. The gender bias in committee representation is clearly evident (see Table 1). Committee members were selected for being leaders in their fields; an academic leadership position, which denotes excellence, status, and respect. Quality assurance and assessments of quality are deeply political processes and the gender representation of ERA Evaluation Committees reveals an imbalance of influence in the ERA quality assurance project.

It is not merely the percentage of men and women on the ERA Evaluation Committees that should be of concern, but rather, what constitutes academic knowledge, how it is produced and how it is measured. It has to do with the gendered assumptions that are made about the academic enterprise when only men are visible and are seen as producers, publishers and evaluators of knowledge. Equality is achieved when power is shared between men and women, when women get to also participate in and shape the rules and traditions, so that the foundations of the university organisation may be based on the experiences, ideas and contributions of both genders. The underrepresentation of academic women in Australian higher education is not simply about the percentage of women. Blackmore (2013) proposes that what is needed is a refocusing of the feminist gaze away from numerical representation of women in leadership to a more nuanced understanding of the gender inequalities experiences by women in academia, and how such measurements of research performance informs notions of university leadership. Nevertheless, without a critical mass of women in influential decision-making positions notions of quality and excellence and the measurement of these are severely weakened. There is a need to look more

Table 1. Gender representation of ERA Evaluation Committees, 2012



closely at social relations of gender and power. Power itself must be theorised (Morley, 2013b) because in the Australian academy there is both a gender imbalance and an imbalance of power.

Even if the Evaluation Committees had equal gender representation, quality assurance measures and new managerialism prevents critical engagement with the social relations of gender and power, and this in turn affects how we theorise and practice leadership in academia. Since research performance plays such an intrinsic role in notions of academic excellence and indeed promotion, understanding the relationship between gender representation and research output is crucial to addressing the differences in male and female academic career trajectories and the paucity of women in leadership roles. Notions of the ideal academic have a significant impact on what types of academic endeavours are considered most meritorious and indicative of excellence (Jenkins & Keane, 2014) and this influences not only the composition of 'experts' on ERA Research Evaluation Committees but it impacts on the representation of women in academic leadership positions more broadly. Academic performativity is a masculinist discourse (Smith, 2008), which significantly influences normative understandings of university leadership (Morley, 2013b). Quality assurance is an operational tool for neoliberalising higher education that has facilitated and legitimated what Thornton (2013) describes as a remasculinisation of the university. Women represent a discontinuity to what was once an exclusively masculine domain (Morley, 2014). Considering the ARC's commitment to gender in 2015 ERA reporting, it is interesting to note that the ARC does not disclose (at the time of submission) the gender composition of the 2015 ERA Evaluation Committees. What can be discerned from the list of Evaluation Committee chairs is that in 2015 there is not even a fifty-fifty split in gender representation. Instead, six of the ten committees are to be headed up by a prominent male academic. In its current form, ERA is not a tool suitable for dismantling gendered university structures, nor will it support or facilitate women's promotion and advancement to senior decision-making roles.

Towards a model of socially just quality assurance

Leadership is socially articulated and constituted by a social and policy sphere that many women do not choose or even control (Morley, 2013a, p. 118). Blackmore

proposes that the nature, purpose and capacities of leadership, of educational systems, organisations, and educational reform need to be problematised in order to 'rethink their practices in more socially just ways' (2013, p. 139). New managerialism and quality assurance measures play a significant role in determining the status of women in academia. What might it look like to redirect quality assurance towards principles of social justice? Alternative perspectives of leadership and quality assurance, informed by feminist theory and principles of social justice need to be explored in more detail. There is no definitive answer as to whether this would unequivocally improve the representation of academic women in university leadership, and yet it is necessary to explore the possibilities and limitations of reconceptualising quality assurance measures from feminist and social justice perspectives.

In her formative essay 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (1984) Audre Lorde proclaims that it is not possible for feminists to truly transform patriarchal hegemony from within institutions that sustain and perpetuate inequality. She asks: 'what does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?' (1984, p. 112). Lorde claims that operating within a patriarchal structure offers limited parameters for change. With the advent of affirmative action, equal employment opportunity, and workplace diversity, universities can no longer be described exclusively as antiquated ivory towers of patriarchal hegemony. Universities are complex institutions with an array of competing discourses at play. They are, however, as Acker (1990) and Morley (1999) reveal, gendered in their structural foundations as well as in their day-to-day operationalisation. It must be acknowledged that to reference Lorde in this context, is to perhaps move away from the aims of her maxim. However, Lorde's dialectical writings can nevertheless be applied to the gendered issue of quality assurance measures in Australian higher education. Using Lorde's metaphor, ERA can be understood as a patriarchal tool, but more specifically, ERA is a tool of neoliberal corporate new managerialism, which has significant gendered consequences for women in higher education. It is a quality assurance measure that, in its current form, does not benefit women in academia. 'The master's tools' is a complex descriptor that offers positive and negative connotations. It is a metaphor for exploring privilege, power, and judgement. While Lorde's statement might appear to be a cliché or an overly simplistic binary, her words are polysemic, and invite the need for a critical

reflection on neoliberalism and gender equality in the present. Lorde is challenging reformist feminists toward a more radical subjectivity.

In contrast, Luke argues that quality assurance 'can be used strategically for a politics of transformation in the interests of women' (1997, p. 434). Luke examines the positive and negative consequences of quality assurance on women in academia, and reveals how the introduction of quality assurance in higher education in the early 1990s made gender discrimination visible through formal grievance processes and opened up boardroom doors to women's participation in department committee meetings. The advent of quality assurance enfranchised female staff and students on campus. The previous 'no-systems culture' allowed sexism and misogyny to go unfettered. A lack of any formal processes 'legitimated a male professoriate in sovereign control of departmental fiefdoms' (Luke, 1997, p. 443). At this time, quality assurance was closely connected with the equity agenda in both the public service and higher education and Luke considers its mechanisms as an opportunity for 'equity-orientated change management' (1997, p. 437). Luke's proposal has been expanded upon by the work of Morley (2003, 2005, 2013a, 2014) as well as by Blackmore and Sachs (2007), Deem *et al.* (2008), and Bagihole and White (2011) and yet it is worth revisiting Luke's original argument in conversation with more recent literature because it marks an interesting shift in understanding the capacity of quality assurance, and was written just prior to a period of political and economic change in Australia, which saw dramatic cuts to higher education funding, an increase in tuition fees, and quality assurance reform measures not dissimilar to what is occurring in the present. Luke's perspective can be understood as a move away from Lorde's statement on the tools of patriarchy. Luke is proposing that quality assurance could in fact be a tool for systemic intervention: quality assurance for social justice. She rejects the monolithic discourse of managerialism, corporatism and economic rationalism and urges a feminist review that would create alternate opportunities for women. Luke contests what she argues is the futile feminist stance that women reject the notion of subverting patriarchy from within institutions, and cites the implementation of quality assurance as an opportunity to make visible women's contributions in higher education.

Quality assurance may indeed as Luke suggests present new opportunities for women and offer a new paradigm for understanding academic work. This burgeoning area of management has offered women new leadership opportunities. However, these management positions

are often a horizontal sidestep away from centralised executive leadership and positions of influence, which may limit the impact such roles have on university strategy and decision-making (Morley, 2013a, 2014; Grummell *et al.*, 2009). Quality assurance projects remain committed to management and control over processes and there is a persistent pattern of gender segregation in such approaches. Horizontal and vertical forms of gender segregation in organisations and gender divisions in paid and unpaid labour are partly created through gendered practices and processes (Acker, 1990; Grummell *et al.*, 2009). There are distinct patterns of women clustering in administrative and academic portfolios produced by new managerialism, which Morley (2014) states, is a strategic incorporation of equity. Women's leadership capabilities are still considered to be 'soft' management skills and are not valued in a management culture strongly focused on research output. Women occupy more junior positions, while promotional panels and interview committees are dominated by senior academic men (White *et al.*, 2011). As such, women are systematically redirected away from pathways to influential leadership positions (Morley, 2014).

In a recent stimulus paper on women and leadership in higher education Morley (2013b) highlights that a mix of equity measures such as policies, quotas, targets, and statistical monitoring is needed to improve the gender representation of academic women in leadership. In contrast, Grummell *et al.* (2009) note that for many gender issues, work-life balance and equal opportunity policies will have little effect if gendered moral assumptions of care work are not problematised. Bagihole and White (2011) suggest that female mentorship and role modelling as well as a critique of leadership and the roles and responsibilities of senior management are all positive examples of successful methods of intervention. However ambiguous and contradictory this proposal for socially just quality assurance might seem, there is a potentiality in such measures. Luke is committed to the notion that quality assurance and new managerialism presents an opportunity for women to become change agents for the academic advancement of women. Indeed, Bolden *et al.* (2012, p. 2) in their report on academic leadership in the United Kingdom found that 'individual academics may become regarded as leaders when they are seen to fight for a common cause'. Such everyday interactions and practices can influence workplace cultures and change institutional norms and yet the global literature suggests that women and men continue to be placed differently within the university and with differential access to leadership opportunities (Morley, 2013b).

While Luke's optimism for the potential of quality assurance as a feminist instrument for gender equality is constructive, it nevertheless highlights that the privilege and power of external auditors, whom this system benefits, limits the autonomy and agency of universities to change or challenge quality assurance measures. Houston & Paewai (2013) propose that incorporating more reflexivity into quality assurance measures could improve quality assurance outcomes. However, they concede that there are slim chances for change. When gender equity is construed as an optional 'add-on' divorced from the aims of excellence, equity competes with other markers of excellence for priority (Jenkins, 2013). Equity issues now compete for precedence with other sector-wide priorities such as domestic funding constraints, international rankings, and online learning, and White *et al.* (2011) note that new managerialism has not necessarily led to increased support or academic opportunities for women. It is an oversimplification to claim unequivocally that new managerialism and to a similar extent, quality assurance, have either benefited or hindered the careers of academic women. Rather there are a myriad of convergent ways in which this new managerialist quality assurance agenda influences gender differences in academia, and this requires further critical attention.

Conclusion

Gender differences in research output are a result of deep-rooted inequalities embedded in the research careers of men and women and workplace cultures that invent and reproduce gendered stereotypes (Acker, 1990). Current quality assurance measures adversely affect women. Gendered reporting results in gendered outcomes. Performance indicators continue to reflect and valorise the ideal academic as male and masculine principles of knowledge production, which dominate structures of governance. The archetype academic continues to be male and quality assurance operates to reinforce this (Smith, 2008). 'Until power and structural causes of inequalities are addressed', Fitzgerald and Wilkinson offer, 'change is unlikely to be anything other than perfunctory' (2010, p. 35). Models of change are part of the neoliberal-patriarchal university enterprise paradox. While some women may have been able to forge careers out of quality assurance in higher education and made women more visible as quality managers, quality assurance reproduces gendered patterns in the academic workplace (Morley, 2003, 2005). Strachan notes that unfortunately, the 'legal provisions for equal opportunity have not translated into reality

for all women' (2010, p. 119). The gender segregation of university professorial and leadership positions remains a feature, and affects the status of academic women in the Australian academy.

Despite scholarly criticism and dissatisfaction with quality assurance in universities, quality assurance as a new managerialist methodology prevails (Houston & Paewai 2013; Morley, 2003; Reddan, 2008). This in itself reaffirms the status (or lack thereof) of gender equity in quality assurance. The gender equality agenda is sidelined as universities orient themselves towards export markets. Placing economic profit ahead of the social and cultural benefits of research only serves to reinforce the political priorities of external agents and the heuristic processes of quality assurance management. Skolnik notes that 'if there is a genuine desire to recognise the diverse views regarding quality and to strive for educational improvement, then the quality assessment process should be designed in a way that will further these ends' (2010, p. 17). To problematise quality assurance projects such as ERA is to think critically about the processes and structures that are operating in higher education and how gender differences might be taken into account. ERA has significant repercussions for female academics, which will ultimately reshape the university landscape. Australian higher education is on the brink of a new era; if quality assurance is an inevitable feature of the corporatised university then measures and reporting must take into account the diverse experiences and career paths of female academics. It must prioritise gender. Equity and equality must remain central to notions of quality.

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